
NEW JERSEY NRCS POLICY ON PRESCRIBED BURNING

NRCS supports and encourages the use of prescribed burning on pastureland, hayland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land, and wildlife land to reduce wildfire hazard and to meet other specific resource management objectives. The New Jersey standard for prescribed burning is in Section IV of the NJ Technical Guide.

Training, certification, and authority

NRCS encourages its employees to participate in prescribed burning training activities and workshops. Training is required to address both the principles of planning and safely executing the prescribed burn, as well as the effect that the fire will have on the plant and animal species and communities within the burn area.

The extent to which an NRCS employee may provide technical assistance will be restricted by the job approval authority and/or certification level that has been attained. Authority criteria are progressive in nature allowing employees to participate in prescribed burns only when they are qualified to do so.

NRCS assistance must adhere to all Federal, State, and local laws regarding outdoor burning, fire control, smoke management, and air quality. In New Jersey, the NJ Forest Fire Service, a division of the Department of Environmental Protection, is responsible for burning activities. NRCS will work with and through the NJ Forest Fire Service to fully utilize their expertise, personnel, and equipment.

Prescribed burns will also be cleared through such groups as rural fire departments, county freeholders, township supervisors, the NJ Forest Fire Service, law enforcement offices, adjacent landowners, and other wildlife and natural resource agencies, as applicable.

The landowner is responsible for obtaining all permits and clearances as required by law. These laws include:

- the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. 7401 – 7671q),
- N.G.A.C Title 7, Chapter 27, Air Pollution Control Code, Subchapter 2 – Control and Prohibition of Open Burning, and
- N.J.S.A. Title 13 Forest Fire Laws.

All burns require a NJ Forest Fire Service Permit.

Technical application assistance

Only NRCS personnel with the required training and/or certification are authorized to assist with the planning and application of prescribed burns. Extent of assistance is restricted by the individual's job approval authority, certification level, or both.

Safety must always be the first consideration in prescribed burning. The landowner or cooperator must be informed in writing that he or she may be liable for damages if the fire escapes or smoke damage occurs. If unfavorable or unstable atmospheric, fuel, or logistical situations exist, the NRCS employee must advise the Incident Commander (fire boss) or landowner to postpone the burn. If an emergency situation develops, NRCS employees are to follow the direction of the designated Incident Commander and act responsibly to resolve the situation.

Planning prescribed burns

The national and state practice standards for prescribed burning are used to guide the overall development of the detailed plan. A detailed plan for the prescribed burn must be prepared. Required items to be addressed include, but are not limited to:

- Location of the burn
- Resource management objectives of the burn. (Wildfire reduction must be one of the objectives)
- Pre-burn vegetative description of the area
- Prescription for weather conditions required to initiate and complete the burn
- Description of the burning method to be used
- Description of pre-burn preparation
- Firing sequence of area to be burned
- Job assignments and descriptions of responsibilities for all persons assisting with the burn
- Equipment and materials checklist
- Job assignments and descriptions of responsibilities for all persons assisting with the fire patrol, containment, mop-up, and suppression of the burn
- Post-burn evaluation and management

NRCS employee liability

Employees acting in accordance with all Federal, State, and local laws and within the scope of their work accept no greater or less liability than that associated with the performance of any other assigned duty. Any questions concerning liability should be referred to the State Conservationist.

State office responsibility

The NRCS NJ state office will be responsible for:

- Providing adequate training for employees involved in prescribed burning activities
- Developing job approval authority criteria
- Ensuring that employees act within their training and certification levels
- Ensuring that only qualified NRCS employees are used for reviews and spot checks of prescribed burning activities
- Reviewing and concurring in job approval criteria. This activity will be conducted by the Resource Conservationist for Forestry or other designated specialist.